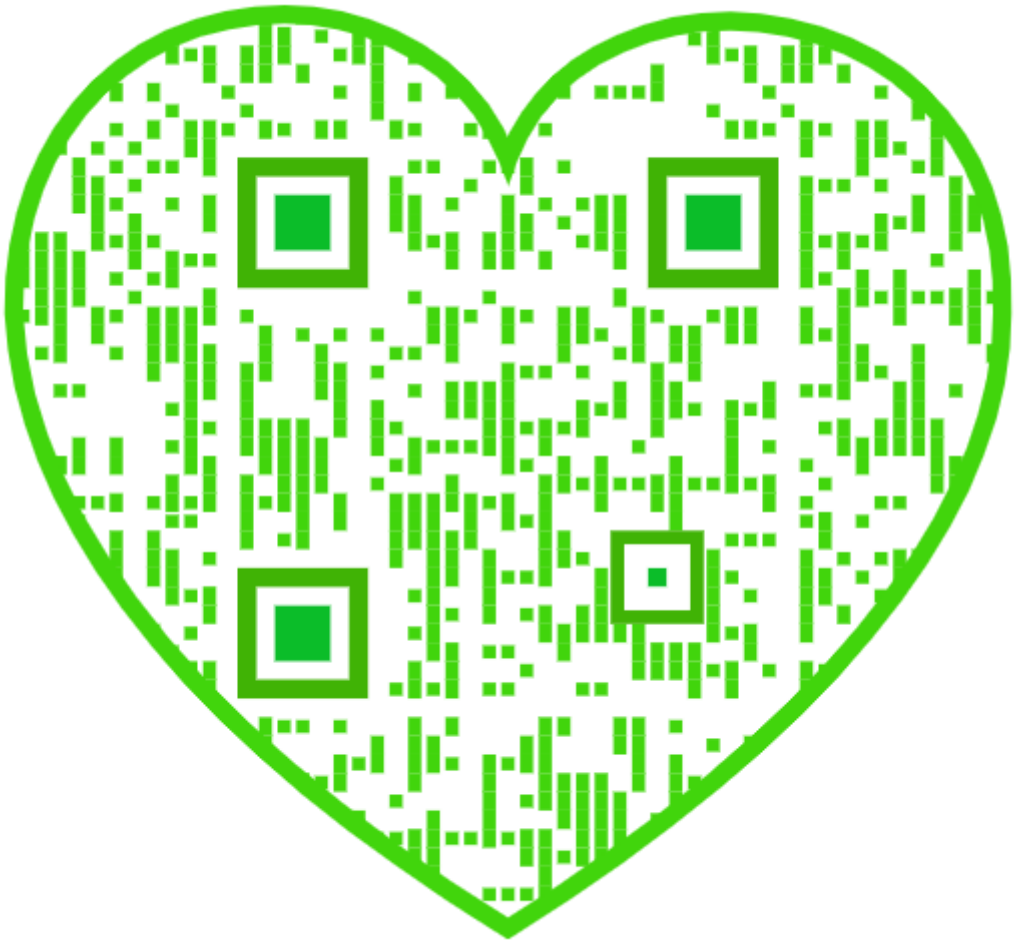

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Children of Christmas

Edith M. Thomas

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Children of Christmas

AND OTHERS

BY

EDITH M. THOMAS

Author of "The Dancers and Other Legends and Lyrics"
"Cassia and Other Verse"

BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER
The Gorham Press
1907

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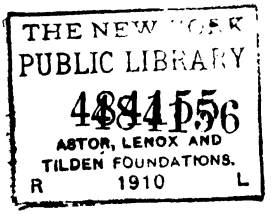

The Gorham Press, Boston

I

CHILDREN OF CHRISTMAS

M.F.CROW MAY 27 10 27cts

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CRADLE SONG

For one Born at Christmas

Happy thou, a winter comer,
  Happier with the snows around thee
Than if rosy-fingered summer
  In thy cradle-nest had crowned thee.

Tender is the night, and holy:
  Little clouds, like cherub faces,
Up the moon path, drifting slowly,
  Vanish in the heavenly spaces.

Clothed in splendor, past our earth night,
  Sphere on sphere is chanting *Nowel:*
Child, thy birthnight keeps a Birthnight
  Dearest in all Time's bestowal!

He who slept within a manger
  Guards the pillow thou art pressing —
Sent thee hither, little stranger,
  Blest — to be our Christmas Blessing!

HOW MANY

Resting her curly head on my knee,
  And slipping her small hand into mine,
My baby girl asks how many there'll be
  On Christmas day when we dine.

Though I've told her before, and she knows very
well,
" There'll be grandpa and grandma," I repeat,
And Uncle Charlie and Aunt Estelle
And Cousin Marguerite.

And Uncle Philip and Cousin Kate,
And mamma's old friend, Miss Madeline;
And — let me see — ah, yes, that is eight,
And Mr. Brownell makes nine!

As I close my story I hear a sigh,
The curly head closer nestles, and then,
In a sad little voice, " How many are I ? "
" My darling! At least you are ten! "

HER CHRISTMAS PRESENT

A True Incident

With doll in arms to court she came,—
A mite of tender years
Between her sobs she put the case,
Her eyes brimmed up with tears.

" They've put my mamma into jail —
And oh, I love her so!
She's very good — my mamma is —
Please, won't you let her go ?

" Just look! She made this doll for me "
(She held it up to view).
The judge did look. " Don't cry," he said,
" We'll see what we can do."

" What charge against the prisoner, clerk ?"
" Sold apples in the street.
She had no license, and, when fined,
The fine she could not meet."

" My mamma's good. Please, let her go."
The judge looked down and smiled;
" So well you've pleaded, she shall be
Your Christmas Present, child.

" Now take this paper, little one,
It sets your mother free.
She should be very proud of you;
Go, tell her so, from me."

With doll in arms away she went,
And soon the prison gained;
And when her mother clasped her close,
The happy child explained:

" A kind, good man like Santa Claus,
With hair as white as snow,
He let you out because — because
I asked him to, you know! "

A CHRISTMAS SPY

When Phœbe brought the wood and coal;
To lay the fire, what did she see
But Baby — dropped upon one knee
And peering up the chimney-hole!

She never turned her little head,
With all its curly, yellow hair:
I asked, " What are you doing there ? "
" Me look for Santa Taus! " she said.

REFRESHMENTS FOR SANTA CLAUS

" It may be late and stormy and cold
When Santa Claus reaches our street;
And Santa, you know, is very old,
So I'll leave him something to eat. "

" And what do you think he would like, dear heart,"
" Something nice and sweet," she said;
" Jelly and jam, and a cranberry tart,
And a *teenty* picee of bread! "

So there on the sideboard is Santa's feast,
Which her own small hands have spread;
Jelly and jam,— three kinds at least,
And a tart — but *where is the bread?* "

HOW THE CHRISTMAS TREE WAS BROUGHT TO NOME

Night of the winter — winter and night in the city of Nome,
There where the many are dwelling, but no man yet has a home!
Desolate league upon league, ice-pack and tundra and hill;
And the dark of the year when the gold-hunter's rocker and dredge are still!

By the fire that is no man's hearth,— by the fire more precious than gold,—
They are passing the time as they may, encompassed by storm and by cold:
And their talk is of pay-streak and bedrock, of claim by seashore or creek,
Of the brigantine fast in the ice-pack this many and many a week;
Wraiths of the mist and the snow encumber her canvas and deck,—
And the Eskimos swear that a crew out of ghostland are crowding the wreck!

Thus, in the indolent dark of the year, in the city of Nome,
They were passing the time as they might, but ever their thoughts turned home.
Said the Man from the East, "In God's country now (where we'd all like to be),
You may bet your life there's a big boom on for the Christmas Tree;
And we'd have one here, but there isn't a shrub as high as my hand,
Nor the smell of spruce, for a hundred miles, in all this land!"

Then the Man from the South arose: "I allow, if the Tree could be found,
I'd 'tend to the fruit myself, and stand ye a treat all round!"
"Done!" said the Man from the West (the youngest of all was he).
"I'll lose my claim in the ruby sand — or I'll find the Tree!"

The restless Aurora is waving her banners wide
through the dome,
And the Man from the West is off, while yet they
are sleeping in Nome!
Off, ere the low-browed dawn, with Eskimo, sledge,
and team:
He is leaving the tundra behind, he is climbing the
source of the stream!
On, beyond Sinrock — on, while the miles and the
dim hours glide —
On, toward the evergreen belt that darkens the
mountain side!
'Tis a hundred miles or more; but his team is
strong, is swift,
And brief are his slumbers at night, in the lee of the
feathery drift!

. . . . . .

There were watchful eyes, there were anxious
hearts in the city of Nome;
And they cheered with a will when the Man from
the West with his prize came home!
And they cheered again for the Christmas Tree
that was brought from far,
Chained to his sledge, like a king of old to the con-
queror's car!

Said the Man from the South, " I'll 'tend to the
fruit that grows on the Tree! "
Said the Man from the East, " Leave the Christmas
dinner and trimmings to me! "

HOLLY AND MISTLETOE

Said the Holly to the Mistletoe:
" Of this holy-tide what canst know,—
Thou a pagan — thou
Of the leafless bough ?
My leaves are green, my scarlet berries shine
At thought of things divine! "

To the Holly spake the Mistletoe:
" Matters not, my leafless boughs but show
Berries pale as pearl —
Ask yon boy and girl!
If human mirth and love be not some sign
Of share in things divine! "

THE FIREBRAND

(*Northern Ohio, Christmas Eve*, 1804)

Hark to a story of Christmas Eve
In the lonely days of yore:
'Tis of the measureless, savage woods
By the great lake's windy shore —
Of mother and child, in a firelit span,
Where the wilderness bows to the toil of man!

" Christmas is coming, and father'll be here;
Through the woods he is coming, I know!
Over his shoulder his ax is laid,
And his beard is white with snow!
Yes, but look in the fire, my child,
At the strange cities there, so bright and so wild! "

" Mother, what are those restless flames
That close by the window pass ? "
" Only the firelight fairies, child,
That dance on the window-glass!
But look, how the sparks up the chimney fly,
Up, and away, to the snowy sky! "

" Oh, listen, what are those shuddering cries,—
Mother, what can they be ? "
" Only the branches that grate on the roof,
When the wind bends down the tree!
Now sing me the song I've taught to you,
That I, myself, as a little child knew! "

" But, mother, those flames dart back and forth —
Like balls of fire they play!
And those shuddering cries are at the door;
' *You must let us in*,' they say! "—
" My child! Your father's whistle I hear —
Say a prayer for him — he is coming near! "

She has seized the tongs, she has snatched a brand,
And waved it abroad at the door!
Through the drifting snow a form she sees —
He is safe, in a moment more;
Safe — and afar are those shuddering cries,
And the baleful lights of the *wolves' red eyes!*

Thus did it chance on a Christmas Eve,
In the days that are long since fled;
But a light so brave, and a gleam so true,
Through the waste of the years is shed,
As I think of that blazing, windblown brand,
Waved at the door by a slim, white hand!

THE FOUNDLING

I

The good man sat before the fire,
And oftentimes he sighed;
The good wife softly wept the while
Her evening work she plied:
One year ago this happy time
The little Marie died!

II

" And surely, now, if she had lived,
She would have reached my knee! "
" And surely, now, if she had lived,
How cunning would she be! "
In fancy each a darling face
Beside their hearth could see.

III

The door swung wide — a gust of wind
The fitful candle blew;
'Twas Franz, the awkward stable-boy,
His clattering step they knew.
" But Franz, speak up, speak up, and tell
What thing has chanced to you! "

IV

His round blue eyes with wonder shone,
His bashful fears had fled:
" I saw — I saw the cattle kneel
Upon their strawy bed;
And in a manger lay the Child —
A light shone round His head! "

V

" He must have dreamed," the good man said,
" A vision, it would seem."
" Nay, master, for the light shone bright
On stall and loft and beam."
Then said the good wife, " I, perhaps,
Might go and dream this dream! "

VI

No further words, but forth she fared,
With Franz to lead the way.
They reached the barn, whose sagging door
Shot out a yellow ray;
The kine did kneel upon the straw,
As truthful Franz did say!

VII

And there — oh, lovely, lovely sight,
Oh, pleading, tender sight!
Within a manger, lapped in hay,
A smiling, rosy mite
The good wife saw, and nearer held
The lantern's yellow light.

VIII

She took the foundling in her arms,
And on its sleeping face
Her tears and kisses fell in one:
" How great is Heaven's grace!
It is the Christ-Child's gift to me,
To ease the aching place! "

MEETING THE KINGS

(Suggested by "A Provençal Christmas Postscript," Thomas A. Janvier)

Long, long ago, in dear Provence, we three!
  Three children, ruddy with the *midi* sun
(And blither none the all-seeing sun might see),
  How happy when the harvest-time was done,
The last slow drop from out the winepress run;
  And when the frost at morn was thick like snow;
And when Clotilde at evening sang and spun,
  And old folk, by the new fire's ruddy glow,
  Would tell, as I do now, the tales of long ago!

Those tales— ah, most of all, we begged to hear
  The tales our grandsires from their grandsires had—
How, in the darkening undertime of year,
  When with first-fallen snow the fields were clad,
That blessèd time when nothing can be sad
  (Such peace through Christ's dear might encircles all),
How, then, the sleeping hives made murmur glad—
  The white ox knelt within his littered stall,
  And voices strange and sweet were heard through heaven to call!

We were three children— René, Pierre, Annette.
  The little sister listened, wonder-eyed;
Each held her hand (that touch, I feel it yet!),
  And all three drank those tales of Christmas tide.
The leaden-footed time how shall we bide?

How many days and hours we know full well,
Almost the little minutes that divide!
Meanwhile, like music of a hidden bell,
Our beating hearts keep up the chime, *Noël*,
Noël!

One thing there was, desired above all things:
" Say, will they come (as ever from of old) —
The wise, the good, the three great Eastern Kings,
Who brought rich gifts,— frankincense, myrrh,
and gold ? "
How often of their names had we been told —
Balthasar, Melchior, Gaspard,— splendid all,
Wide-turbaned, sandal-shod, and purple-stoled,
Perhaps upon white steeds, curbed-in, and tall,
Or else on camels with the velvet-soft footfall!

" Will they at vespers be, on Holy Night ?
And will they stop and see the little shrine
Where Jesus lies beneath the Star's true light,
As when, at first, they found him by that sign ? "
"Hush, René, hush! and if the eve be fine,
Thou — yes, all three — shall go to meet the
Kings.
But children — mark ye well these words of mine!
Each way, of four, to town the traveler brings;
So it may chance ye miss them in your wander-
ings."

Such sage replies our questions would receive.
The Holy Time drew near, and yet more near;
At last, it was the morning of the Eve,
All day we swayed from lovely hope to fear.
" 'Too early ?' Nay, 'tis twilight, mother dear —

At least, so very soon the sun will set! "
" Your warmest coats — the air is sharp and clear.
And in your hurry, children, don't forget
That baby feet tire soon — remember p'tite
Annette! "

" No, no! I do not tire, though fast I run! "
Ah, how we laughed to see the red lips pout—
The small sweet pride that would not be outdone
In such a race, by brothers big and stout!
" Annette the first shall see the Kings, no doubt"—
It was our grandsire spake with twinkling eye.
" Yes, yes; she shall," impatient to be out,
We answered. Once beneath the deepening sky,
We ever took the sunset way — as late birds
thither fly!

For thus we reasoned with one grave consent:
If yonder star above our mountain's crest
Should be that Eastern star for guidance lent,
Then must the Kings be journeying from the
West.
So on we ran, past harvest fields at rest,
Past sheepfolds where the flock of summer
dreamed
(Full soon they would be kneeling, as we guessed!)
And on, and on — and now, at times, it seemed
Far down the twilight road rich banners waved
and gleamed.

But ever of enchanted weft they proved,
On sunset's pageant field emblazoned low;
And caravans, still moving as we moved,
At length, for straggling olive trees would show.

Then, while less confident our pace would grow,
Wiser than I — a twelvemonth and a day,
Would René counsel: Might it not be so —
As we had heard our own dear mother say —
The roads are four — the Kings had come another way?

No time to lose. We took the homeward track,
The Kings at vespers might be lingering still.
Soon were we in the church. Alack, alack!
The Kings had passed; for though they bore good will
To our good parish, yet must they fulfil
The prayers of all; and there were other folk
Who, if unvisited, would take it ill.
" 'Tis said they must reach Arle by midnight stroke;
Sweet spices they have left — judge by the censer's smoke! "

We boys took manfully this frown of Fate;
But tears stood in petite Annette's blue eyes.
" Another year, my precious,— thou canst wait;
Besides, to-morrow morn a fine surprise
There'll be for children who are sage and wise.
Gifts — but I may not tell you now, my child."—
'Twas mother-love that did such cure devise
For bud-nipped hopes and hearts unreconciled;
We slept, and dreamed, on this — and then, the morning smiled!

Time passed. We never saw the Kings. Ah, well —
At least the two of us saw not, I know.
But how shall I the wonder of it tell?
There came a winter wild and dim with snow.
It seemed to us that sheeted ghosts did go
Upon the wind, that never ceased to moan.
And one of us with fever was laid low:
Like leaves the little hands were tossed and thrown,
And on her cheek the rose of fever was o'erblown!

The storm was done. The day threw off its shroud —
('Twas Christmas Eve — till then by all forgot),
And suddenly, across a scarp of cloud
One crimson flame, a parting sunbeam shot.
It reached Annette upon the low, white cot,
It touched our mother's face, Madonna-mild.
With dreaming eyes that saw us, yet saw not,
Petite Annette threw out her hand and smiled:
"Pierre! The Kings have come, and with them is a Child!"

Long, long ago in dear Provence was grief.
In vain the troubadour may sing Noël!
In vain the birds give thanks for Christmas sheaf,
In vain I heard, "God loved Annette so well
That He hath taken her to heaven to dwell."
No comfort till René would whisper me:
"O brother, think upon it — who can tell? —
Perhaps there was no other way, to *see!*
And, Pierre, remember how she told the news to thee!"

THE PROCESSION OF THE KINGS

The little town is muffled all in snow;
  Yet there *Weihnachten** love is burning clear.
And on each door three letters † in a row
  Proclaim the Three Kings' Day is drawing near.

Oh, then will Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar
  Ride through the country on their horses white!
And all the people, live they far or near,
  Will early rise and follow with delight.

And never will the great procession stop
  Till they Christkindlein and his mother greet:
Then on their knees the turbaned kings will drop,
  And fill her lap with gifts, and kiss his feet;

For they will find her, sitting still and meek
  Upon a bench beside some stable-shed,
Her soft hair brushing dear Christkindlein's cheek,
  And sunshine brightness all around each head!

Then, while the old folk smile through happy tears,
  Blame not the children if a shout they raise
When little *Esel*,‡ with his pointed ears,
  Leans o'er the fence with puzzled, wistful gaze.

There, too, the gentle, great black ox will stand:
  Folk say he knelt at night in strawy stall;
Perchance he knows these kings from Eastern land,
  For now he lifts his head with lowing call!

* *Weihnachten* — Christmas

† In many parts of Southern Germany it is a custom to place on the outer door the initals of the three kings—C, M. B.

‡ *Esel* — German for "donkey,"

MELCHIOR'S RIDE

Melchior rides from door to door,
  Large Christmas doles he seeks;
A pannier wide receives the store,
  Yet never a word he speaks!

The *nougat* bells so merrily ring
  Yet never a note he hears;
He gathers the gifts the good folk bring,
  And onward still he steers.

The children laugh, and the children chaff,
  He sits so stiff and straight,
And grandpère waves, with his thorn-tree staff,
  A greeting at the gate!

Olives and almonds, and cheese and bread,
  And the pack on his back grows stout!
Let the hungry poor to their fill be fed,
  While the *nougat* bells ring out.

Thus, Melchior rides from door to door,
  Seeking of all his fee;
And their presents into his pannier pour,
  Yet never a whit cares he!

For a wicker-work man is Melchior droll,
  A wicker-work man, and no more;
But the people love him, with heart and soul,
  As he rides from door to door!

ONE OF THE TWELVE

A Christmas Carol

From the Provençal of Roumanille

" Great stir among the shepherd folk;
To Bethlehem they go,
To worship there a God whose head
On straw is laid full low;
Upon the lovely newborn Child
Their gifts will they bestow.

" But I, who am as poor as Job —
A widowed mother I,
Who for my little son's sweet sake
For alms to all apply —
Ah, what have I that I can take
The Child of Love most high ?

" Thy cradle and thy pillow, too,
My little lamb forlorn,
Thou sorely needest them — no, no,
I cannot leave thee shorn!
I cannot take them to the God
That in the straw was born."

Oh, miracle! The nursing babe —
The babe e'en as he fed —
Smiled in his tender mother's face,
And, " Go, go quick! " he said;
" To Jesus, to my Saviour, take
My kisses and my bed."

The mother, all thrilled through and through,
To heaven her hands did raise;
She gave the babe her breast, then took
The cradle — went her ways, . . .
And now, at Bethlehem arrived,
To Mary Mother says:

" O Marv, Pearl of Paradise,
That heaven on earth hath shed,
O Virgin Mother, hear the word
My little babe hath said:
To Jesus, to my Saviour, take
My kisses and my bed.

" Here, Mary, here the cradle is;
Thy need is more than mine;
Receive, and in it lay thy Son,
Messiah all-divine!
And let me kiss, upon my knees,
That darling Babe of thine! "

The blessed Virgin, then, at once,
Right glad of heart, bent low,
And in the cradle laid her Child,
And kissed him, doing so.
Then with his foot St. Joseph rocked
The cradle to and fro.

" Now, thanks to thee, good woman, thanks,
For this that thou hast done."
Thus say they both, with friendly looks.
" Of thanks I merit none;
Yet, holy Mother, pity me,
For sake of thy dear Son."

Since then a happy soul was hers;
God's blessing on her fell;
One of the Twelve her child became,
That with our Lord did dwell.
Thus was this story told to me,
Which I afar would tell.

THE WITCH'S CHILD

'Tis Elfinell — a witch's child,
From holy minster banned. . . .
Again the old glad bells ring out
Through all the Christmas land.

No gift might she receive or give,
Nor kneel to Mary's child:
She watched from far the joyous troop
That past the Crib defiled;

Far in the shadow of the porch,
Yet even there espied:
"Now, hence away, unhallowed Elf!"
The sacristan did chide.

"Hence, till some witness thou canst bring
Of gift received from thee,
In His dear name, whose birth we sing,
But this shall never be!"

Poor Elfinell — she turned away:
"Though none for me may speak,
Yet there be those may take my gift;
And them I go to seek!"

So, flitting light through lonesome fields
By summer long forgot,
She crossed the valley drifted deep —
The brook in icy grot;

And gained, at last, a still, white wood
All hung with flowers of snow:
There, down she sat, and quaintly called
In tender tones and low.

They heard and came — the doe and fawn,
The squirrel and the hare,
And dwellers shy in earthy homes,
And wanderers of the air!

To these she gave fresh leaves of kale.
To those the soft white bread,
Or filberts smooth, or yellow corn;
So each and all she fed.

She fed them from her hand — she sighed;
" Might you but speak for me,
And say, ye took my Christmas gift,
Then, I the Crib might see! "

At this, those glad, wild creatures join,
And close the child around;
They draw her on, she scarce knows how,
Across the snowy ground!

They crowd with soft, warm, furry touch;
They stoop with frolic wing:
Grown strangely bold, to haunts of men
The elfin child they bring!

They reach the town, the minster door;
The door they straightway pass;
And up the aisle and by the priest
That saith the holy mass.

Nor stay, until they reach the Crib
With all its wreathen greens;
And there above, with eyes of love,
The witch-child looks and leans!

Spake, then, the priest to all his flock:
" Forbid no more this child!
To speak for her, God sendeth these,
His loved ones of the wild!

" 'Twas God that made them take her gift,
Our stubborn hearts to shame!
Melt, hearts of ours; and open, hands,
And give in Christ's dear name."

Thus, Elfinell with gifts was showered,
Upon a Christmas Day;
The while, beside the altar's font,
The ban was washed away.

A carven stall the minster shows,
Whereon ye see the priest —
The kneeling child — and clustering forms
Of friendly bird and beast.

BABUSHKA

(*A Russian Legend*)

Babushka sits before the fire
  Upon a winter's night;
The driving winds heap up the snow,
  Her hut is snug and tight;
The howling winds,— they only make
  Babushka's more bright!

She hears a knocking at the door:
  So late — who can it be ?
She hastes to lift the wooden latch,
  No thought of fear has she;
The wind-blown candle in her hand
  Shines out on strangers three.

Their beards are white with age, and snow
  That in the darkness flies;
Their floating locks are long and white,
  But kindly are their eyes
That sparkle underneath their brows,
  Like stars in frosty skies.

" Babushka, we have come from far,
  We tarry but to say,
A little Prince is born this night,
  Who all the world shall sway.
Come, join the search; come, go with us,
  Who go our gifts to pay."

Babushka shivers at the door:
  " I would I might behold
The little Prince who shall be King,

But ah! the night is cold,
The wind so fierce, the snow so deep,
And I, good sirs, am old."

The strangers three, no word they speak,
But fade in snowy space!
Babushka sits before her fire,
And dreams, with wistful face:
" I would that I had questioned them,
So I the way might trace!

" When morning comes with blessèd light,
I'll early be awake;
My staff in hand I'll go,— perchance,
Those strangers I'll o'ertake;
And, for the Child some little toys
I'll carry, for His sake."

The morning came, and, staff in hand,
She wandered in the snow.
She asked the way of all she met,
But none the way could show.
" It must be farther yet," she sighed;
" Then farther will I go."

And still, 'tis said, on Christmas Eve,
When high the drifts are piled,
With staff, with basket on her arm,
Babushka seeks the Child:
At every door her face is seen,—
Her wistful face and mild!

Her gifts at every door she leaves;
  She bends, and murmurs low,
Above each little face half-hid
  By pillows white as snow:
" And is He here ? " Then, softly sighs,
  " Nay, farther must I go! "

A CHRISTMAS OFFERING

(Florence, Italy)

I shall never forget Cimabue's Madonna,
  No, nor the niche close by in the wall,
Where, on the straw, the Bambino was lying,
  While the oxen knelt in the stall.

Rude are the images, tinsel the flowers;
  But a tear to the eye unconsciously starts,
Beholding the tribute the children have rendered,
  In the votive gift of " hearts "!

Among them a little gold watch was hanging,
  That told of some sick child's treasured wealth,
Sent with a prayer that his Christmas present
  Might be the good gift of health!

CHRISTMAS POST

In Sulz-am-Neckar, when night shuts down,
  And the Christmas Eve has come,
All through the little snow-white town
  There's a joyous stir and hum.

Now here and now there, along the street,
From windows wide open flung,
Float childish laughter and prattle sweet
In the kindly German tongue.

For the happy moment at last is here,
When each child a letter sends,
Directed to *Christkindlein* dear —
The Children's Friend of Friends!

Then, out at the window — strung on a thread,
The precious letter is cast;
Though far and high on the night wind sped,
'Twill be found and read at last!

In Sulz-am-Neckar, prompt as the day,
The children awake to find
Among the Christmas branches gay
Christkindlein's answer kind!

THE CHRISTMAS SHEAF

(*Provençal*)

It was a gleaner in the fields,—
The fields gleaned long ago:
The evening wind swept down from heights
Already brushed with snow.

The gleaner turned to right, to left,
With searching steps forlorn;
The stubble-blade beneath her feet
Was sharp as any thorn.

But as she stooped, and as she searched,
Half blind with gathering tears,
Beside her in the field stood One
Whose voice beguiled her fears:

" What seek ye here, this bitter eve,
The harvest long gone by ? "
She lifted up her weary face,
She answered with a sigh:

" I seek but some few heads of wheat
To nail against the wall,
To feed at morn the blessed birds,
When with loud chirps they call.

" Poor ever have I been, God knows!
Yet ne'er so poor before,
But they might taste their glad Noël
Beside my cottage door."

Then answer made that Presence sweet,
" Go home, and trust right well
The birds beside your cottage door
Shall find their glad Noël."

And so it was — from soundest sleep
The gleaner woke at morn,
To see, nailed up beside her door,
A sheaf of golden corn!

And thereupon the birds did feast,—
The birds from far and wide:
All know it was Our Lord Himself
That goodly sheaf supplied!

THE BIRDS ON THE CHRISTMAS SHEAF

" And wherefore," the finch to the starling said,
On the Christmas sheaf, as they hungrily fed,
" Wherefore do now the children of men
Open their hands, when, again and again,
They drove us away from their plenteous store,
From the corn in the field, from the threshing-floor ? "
" That," said the starling, " I'll try to explain:
They are feasting, themselves, and they spare us this grain;
For oft, as they feast and make merry, they sing,
' Peace upon earth and good will'—— "
" But this thing"
(Said the finch), " we birds have been singing all year,
Then, why not before have they shared their good cheer ? "

WHAT THE PINE TREES SAID

I heard the swaying pine trees speak,
As I went down the glen:
" Next year," said one, " the wind shall seek,
But find me not again! "

" I shall go forth upon the seas,
A mast, or steering-beam;
On me shall breathe the tropic breeze,
Above, strange stars shall gleam.'

" And I — the ax shall cleave my grain,
And many times divide;
From my dear brood I'll shed the rain,
And roof their ingleside."

Then up and spake a slender shaft,
That like an arrow grew;
" No breeze my leafless stem shall waft,
No ax my trunk shall hew —

But though a single hour is mine,
How happy shall I be!
Young hearts shall leap, young eyes shall shine
To greet their Christmas tree! "

TWO CHILD ANGELS

Two Child Angels on Christmas Night,
They stood on the brow of Heaven's hill;
The stars beneath them were glancing bright,
And the air was clear and still.

" That is the Earth that dazzles so —
That shines with a glad and a radiant light —
That is the Earth where, long ago,
I was born on the Christmas Night! "

Thus said the one, and the other replied,
" Forever dear is the Earth in my sight;
For there, full long ago, I died,
On the holy Christmas Night! "

THE OLD DOLL

(Just after Christmas)

Little one, little one, open your arms,
  Now are your wishes come true, come true!
Here is a love with a thousand charms,
  And see! she is reaching her hands out to you!
Put the old doll by, asleep let her lie,
  And open your arms to welcome the new.

Little one, little one, play your sweet part,
  Mother-love lavishes treasure untold.
Whisper fond words, and close to your heart,
  Your warm little heart, the new idol enfold.
('Tis so with us all,— to worship we fall
  Before the new shrine, forgetting the old!)

. . . . . .

Little one, little one, wherefore that sigh?
  Weary of playing the long day through?
But there's something that looks like a tear in your eye,
  And your lips — why, your lips are quivering, too!
Do I guess aright? — it is coming night,
  And you cry for the old — you are tired of the new?

Little one, little one, old loves are best;
  And the heart still clings though the hands loose their hold!
Take the old doll back, in your arms she shall rest,
  When you wander away to the dreamland fold.
(With all, even so, — ere to sleep we go,
  The wavering heart wavers back to the old!)

II

OTHER CHILDREN

THE APPLE-BLOSSOM SWITCH

It was the daughter of a fairy witch,—
A sweet, though wayward child.
" Go, naughty Elfinella, bring a switch
From yonder fruit tree wild! "

(It was the charming time of all the year,—
The darling month of May
And every bush and thicket, far and near,
With leaves and flowers was gay.)

Poor Elfinella heard, and off she went,
With lagging steps and slow,
To where, amidst the wild, a fruit tree bent,
Her branches spreading low.

With blossomy boughs the motherly old tree
The tearful child begirt:
" My twigs are clothed with flowers; and you will see
The switch will never hurt! "

She broke a branch, with blossoms thickly set,
And lightly homeward tripped,—
The switch was used — but little did she fret;
For she with flowers was whipped!

THE INDIGNANT BABY

Baby was out with Papa for a walk.
When their friends they met, it was "Oh!" and
"Ah!"
"What a darling she is!" "Can the little kid
talk?"
"Well — no; I don't think that she can," said
Papa,
"Though she seems to understand."

She was only two, but she understood,
And her small, rosy mouth was made up to cry —
But no! she would *talk* — she would show that she
could.
And, "Mamma," and "pretty," and "laly" —
"by-by,"
She said with a wave of her hand!

A QUESTION OF SPELLING

They were looking through their book
With pictures of the Zoo;
Both too young to read the text,
But each the pictures knew.

Will was three, and Ray was five —
And five years old is *old!*
When his wiser brother spoke,
Will did as he was told!

" Look! I've found the *efalunt!* "
" Don't say *efalunt,*" said Ray.
Said their mother: " You should tell
Little brother what to say."

" Don't say efalunt — that's wrong;
It's efa*lint!* " said Ray.
" *Efalint!* " said little Will,
In his confiding way.

" YOURS SEVERELY"

(*The Letter of a Five Year Old*)

Once more she dipped her pen in ink,
And wrote: " I love you dearly."
" And now," she said, and stopped to think,
" I'll put, ' I'm
Yours severely. ' "

A LACK OF ATTENTION

She had folded her hands, and had never stirred
Nor even spoken one little word.
In fact, she was good as good could be,
While the grown folks talked, and sipped their tea
At last, a small voice from the corner we heard:
" Nobody pays any pension to me! "

" I OUGHT TO MUSTN'T "

The chair was so near, and the shelf was so low,
And I opened the door just in time to see
The last of the coveted caramels go,
While a look imploring was cast on me,
"I ought to mustn't, I know!"

The chair was so near, and the shelf was so low,—
To punish, alas! no courage I had:
And I did as, perhaps, you yourself might do,—
I kissed her, right there, so sweet and so bad!
But " I ought to mustn't," I knew!

A VAIN REGRET

He was six years old, just six that day,
And I saw he had something important to say,
As he held in his hand a broken toy:
He looked in my face for an instant, and then
He said, with a sigh, and a downcast eye,
" If I could live my life over again,
I think I could be a better boy! "

IN THE DARK LITTLE FLAT AT THE END OF THE COURT

What can the children in cities do,
The children shut in from wholesome sport —
The children that live, all winter through,
In the dark little flat at the end of the court ?

Yet a comfort they have (and a beautiful one!),
  Though the days are chill and the days are short;
At noon, for a moment, looks in the sun,
  In the dark little flat at the end of the court.

Then, the dazzled baby drops his toy,
  Down tumbles the four-year-old's tottering fort—
" Sunshine! " they all cry out, in their joy,
  In the dark little flat at the end of the court.

THE LITTLE GIRL FROM TOWN

Us children liked her, though she was so queer,
When she came out to Pleasantville, last year;
She " mustn't walk upon the grass," she said:
We asked her *why ?*—and she just shook her head!

Oh, yes, us children liked the little kid,
Although she didn't know one thing *we* did,
And said the oddest things you ever heard;
She saw a goose, and asked, " *What kind o' bird ?* "

Us children liked the little kid, oh, yes!
She wa'n't a bit afraid to tear her dress;
One day, when she went barefoot, just like us,
She got a stone-bruise; but she didn't *fuss!*

Oh, yes! us children liked her, but oh, my!
We had to teach her how to play "high spy ";
She came to see us,— called our house " *a flat* "—
I wonder now — what *could* she mean by that ?

FOR EVERY DAY

A flower for every day
That slips the sheath of jealous Night in May!
The violet at our feet,
The lilac's honeyed bough,
The wind-flower frail and sweet,
The apple-blossom now —
Each keeps its promise, as Love keeps its vow:
A flower for every day in flowerful May!

A song for every day
That breaks in music from the heart of May!
The warbler mid new leaves,
The lark in fields remote,
The housewren at our eaves,
The oriole's haunting note
When orchard blooms down fitful zephyrs float:
A song for every day in songful May!

A joy for every day
That stirs the heart to count its joys in May!
Now Fear and Doubt take flight,
Borne down the season's stream;
Grief grows a shape of light,
And melts, a tender dream!
Now but to be alive is boon supreme —
A joy for every day in joyful May!

Be thanks for every day
That from thy heaven thou dost send in May!
My morn an anthem wake,
My noon sweet incense bear

Of labor for thy sake,
My evening breath a prayer.
For bloom — for song — for joy — shed everywhere,
Be thanks to thee each day in thankful May!

THE DAY-DREAMER

There's a day-dream strange and sweet,
Softly hovering in the air:
Now it stays the restless feet,
Now, it smoothes the wayward hair.

Now, it droops the curly head,
Propped upon the window-sill —
Parts the lips of rosebud red,
While the eyes with fancies fill.

Sunbeams from the summer sky
Kiss the arm so round and bare:
There's a day-dream sweet and shy,
Softly hovering in the air!

Is that dream of field or wood,
Mossy bank, or violet dell,
Thrush's nest, with downy brood
Lately prisoned in the shell?

Comes that dream from fairyland,
Blown about in wondrous ways,
Like a skein of gossamer fanned
By a troop of laughing fays?

Or, upon some elfin brook,
Wing of dragon-fly for sail,
Passing many a wildflower nook
Did it drift so light and frail ?

Little dreamer, if I dared,
I would say, " your day-dream tell! "
But it never can be shared,
And one word would break its spell!

BORN DEAF, DUMB, AND BLIND

(*At an Asylum*)

A flower-soft hand once took my own,—
That touch I never shall forget!
A strange voice spoke — so strange a tone
Mine ear had never met!

It said, " Come — see — my — garden,—
Come!"
(The flower-soft fingers closer twined):
The voice of one born deaf and dumb,
The touch of one born blind!

They thrilled me so, the tears came fast;
But in glad haste she led the way;
Through hall and open door we passed
Into a garden gay.

Her share was but a little space.
It bloomed with pansies dark and bright;
And each looked up with elfin grace,
As though to win her sight.

She smiled — the pansy-faces smiled
  Through tears — or was it morning dew ?
Down knelt the deaf and dumb, blind child
  " I do — give — all — to — you! "

I could not stay those fingers swift,
  She plucked me all the flowers she had!
I never shall have any gift
  So sweet as this,— so sad!

THE CRADLE-CHILD

Forgotten, in a chamber lone,
  The hooded Cradle, brown and old,
Began to rock, began to moan,
" Where are the babes I used to hold ? "

" To men and women they are grown,
  And through the world their way must make."
The Cradle rocked and made its moan,
  " My babes no single step could take! "

" A helmsman one, on wide seas blown,
  His sinewy hands the wheel employs."
The Cradle rocked and made its moan,
  " My babes could scarcely grasp their toys."

" And one, with words of winning tone,
  God's shepherd, goes the lost to seek."
The Cradle rocked and still made moan,
  " The babes I held no word could speak! "

" And one, with children of her own,—
Her life is toil and love and prayer! "
The Cradle rocked and still made moan,
" My babes of babes could take no care! "

" Now all that once were mine are flown
But one, that still with me shall bide"—
(The Cradle ceased to rock, to moan)—
" The sweetest one — the babe who died! "

SOME LADIES OF THE OLDEN TIME

A long time ago in Childhood's Land,
A troop of sweet ladies I knew,
If the truth must be told, I myself
Was their lady's maid, patient and true!

I served them, I dressed them, I took them to walk,
I made the fine clothes that they wore;
Very dainty,— and delicate, too, were they all,
For they never arose until four!

Wide were their flounces of crimson or white,
A little old fashioned for now;
Prim were their figures — ah, yes, I must own,
Their heads they never could bow!

Their heads were so round and so small and so green —
Not clever nor learned were they;
But then, they were only Four o'Clock Ladies,
And their life, 'twas a short one and gay!

A WATER LILY

Did I behold the Lady of the Lake
  Part the cool water with a slender hand?
And brought she for her loved knight errant's sake
  Out of some liquid crypt the magic brand?

I dreamed it was the Lady of the Lake —
  I did but dream! Again I looked, and knew
The water lily, white as winter's flake,
  But with a heart all gold and fragrant dew.

THE KINDERBANK *

The Little Mothers

It was a day in warm July,
  It was a far countree;
The bees were humming in the flowers
  That filled the linden tree.

The linden made a cooling shade
  For many a yard around,
And flecks of sunlight here and there
  Did dot the shady ground.

A long, low, easy seat there was
  Beneath the linden green;
And *Kinderbank* across the back
  In letters large was seen.

*In German, the Children's Seat.

I did not need that word to read,
To know the Children's Seat;
For there the grass was trodden down
By many little feet.

Upon this day the *Kinderbank*
Was full as it could be,
With children sitting in a row,
A pleasant sight to see.

Each little woman bent her head,
Too busy far to speak;
Each had a lock of yellow hair
Slipped down across her cheek.

Each little woman pursed her lips
Into a rosebud small,
And never knew how fast time flew —
So busy were they all.

One made the knitting-needles click,
With shining head bent low,
And earnest eyes intent to see
The winter stocking grow.

Another, toiling at a seam,
The thread drew in and out;
And once she sighed — so hard she tried
To make the stitches stout!

But ever, as they worked away,
And would not look around,
They watched the little ones that played
Before them on the ground.

The little ones they laughed and cooed,
And talked their baby-talk;
Their feet so bare were rosy-fair —
For only one could walk!

His flaxen hair in ringlets stood
Upon his serious head;
His eyes so blue were serious, too;
And, drawing near, I said:

" Whose precious baby boy is this,
So thoughtful and so sweet ? "
Then up and spoke a little maid,
Of those upon the seat:

" This baby — he belongs to me.
He goes just where I go;
And I'm his Little Mother — yes,
My mother told me so!

" She said that he was mine ' all day.'
And so it must be true;
I brushed his hair — I take good care,
As she herself would do.

" And I'm quite sure that I can cure,
And drive the pain away,
With kisses, if my baby hurts
His little hand at play!"

" And whose are all these babies here ?
" Why — we — oh, don't you know ? "
We all are Little Mothers — yes,
Our mothers told us so! "

The Little Mothers all looked up,
And each did nod her head:
" Our mothers told us so! " " Ah, then
'Tis true, indeed," I said.

I left them as I found them, there
Beneath the linden tree;
And often since that day I've thought
I'd like to go and see

If still the Little Mothers sit
Upon the Children's Seat,
And watch their babies as they play
And tumble at their feet.

BUONAMICO

A Legend of Florence

I

When Monte Morello is capped with snow,
And the wind from the north comes whistling down,
It is chill to rise with the morning star,
In the " City of Flowers " — in Florence town.

II

Light is the sleep of the old, for they know
How brief are their few remaining days;
But when hearts are young, sleep lingers long,
And too sweet to leave are the dreamful ways.

III

So, Tafi, the master, awoke with the light,
  But the prentice lad, Buonamico, was young,
And his dreaming ears were loath to hear
  The daybreak bell's awakening tongue.

IV

For it seemed to speak with old Tafi's voice,
  " Colors to grind, and the shop to be swept! "
Then, out of his bed, on the bare stone floor,
  Poor Buonamico, shivering, crept.

V

Busy all day with his quick, young hands,—
  Busy his thoughts with a project bold.
" The master will find," he said to himself,
  " 'Tis not well to work in the dark and the cold! "

VI

But the master, unheeding the prentice lad,
  Matched the mosaics fine and quaint;
Till his tablets of stone revealed the forms
  Of Mother and Child, of cherub and saint.

VII

Buonamico, meanwhile, forsook his tasks,
  And, prying in crevice of wall or ground,
With a patience and skill boys only know,
  Thirty great beetles the truant found.

VIII

As many wax tapers, then, he took—
  Thirty small tapers (nor less, nor more),
And presto! each beetle, clumsy and slow,
  On its broad black back a candle bore.

IX

Next morning, ere dawn, when Tafi awoke,
  Ere his lips could frame their usual call,
A sight he beheld that froze his veins —
  An impish procession of tapers small!

X

Slowly they came, and slowly went
  (And they seemed to pass through a crack 'neath
    the door) :
So slowly they moved, he counted them all,
  Thirty they numbered, nor less, nor more!

XI

" Surely, some evil these hands have wrought,
  That the powers of darkness invade my cell! "
And many an *Ave* the master said,
  To reverse and undo the unholy spell.

XII

When daylight was come, Buonamico he told:
  " A good lad ever thou wert, and indeed,
Wise for thy years; and, therefore, speak out,
  And, as best thou canst, this mystery read."

XIII

" May it not be," Buonamico said,
"The powers of darkness, that good men hate,
Are vexed with my master, who falters not
In faithful service, early and late ? "

XIV

" Ay, that they are," said the master, " no doubt! "
Said the prentice-boy, " *Their* time is night,
And it *may* be they like not this wondrous work
Which thou risest to do ere peep of light! "

XV

" Well hast thou counseled," the master replied,
" So young of years— so sage in thy thought;
I will rise no more ere the day hath dawned —
A work of light should in light be wrought! "

XVI

Thus runs the legend, which also saith
Spite of his pranks Buonamico became,
When the years were fled, and Tafi was gone,
A painter who rivaled his master's fame.

THE PRINCE AND THE WHIPPING-BOY

Upon a day of olden days,
A royal lad at school,
In mischief apt, with many a prank,
Defied the good dame's rule.

But England's prince no rod might strike,
  Though rich was his desert;
Another must the penance bear,
  Another feel the hurt!

The " whipping-boy " stood forth to take
  The blows he had not earned;
Full meek he stood; no sense of wrong
  Within his bosom burned.

Young Edward saw the rod upraised,
  His " whipping-boy " to smite;
And suddenly his princely soul
  Revolted at the sight.

The shame, the shame, the tingling shame
  No blood of kings could brook!
Forward he sprung, the falling rod
  In his own hand he took:

" Mine is the blame — be mine the shame
  For what I only wrought;
Let none but me endure the pain
  My deed alone has brought! "

Thus on a day of days, it chanced,
  A royal schoolboy learned
That noble hearts in every age
  A coward's shield have spurned.

MASTER CORVUS

In Rome, beside the Forum,
A cobbler had his shop,
Where, on his way to school,
The schoolboy loved to stop.

The sheets of well-tanned leather
Hung all about the wall;
The cobbler stitched and scolded,
Bent over last and awl.

'Twas not the cobbler's scolding
At which the schoolboys laughed,
Nor did they care to watch
His cunning handicraft.

It was a dapper person
With coat as black as night,
That offered to the schoolboy
An all-year-round delight —

A droll yet silent person,
" Good morrow " — all his speech;
He stood upon a rostrum,
As though to teach or preach.

It was the cobbler's raven,
" Good morrow! " clear and loud
He called, with mimic laughter
That charmed the truant crowd,

Until, at last, reminded
Of school and pedagogue,
Of lecture, and of ferrule
To point his apologue.

And now, would Master Corvus,
To while the time away,
Look 'round, to see what mischief
He might devise to-day.

Alas, the raven's cunning
No bound nor measure knew;
Alas, the cobbler's temper —
It never better grew!

And when his choicest leather
Embossed with claw and beak,
He saw — upon the raven
Swift vengeance he did wreak!

Which done, morose and sullen,
He sat him down once more;
Nor scolded when the schoolboys
Called through the open door:

"Good morrow, Master Corvus!" . . .
No shrill and joyous croak
Responded from within;
And then their anger broke.

"How daredst thou kill the raven,—
The better man of two?"
They seized and beat the cobbler,
Till he for life did sue.

Then took they Master Corvus
From where he lifeless lay —
Their dear and droll companion,
And carried him away.

Said one, " There is a duty
Which to our friend we owe:
In life we gave him honor,
And honor still we'll show! "

" That will we! " cried they warmly
(Young Romans long ago) —
" In life we gave him honor,
And honor still we'll show! "

Next day, along the Forum,
With slow and measured tread,
Defiled the long cortége
Of Master Corvus dead.

His bier was heaped with garlands,
A piper went before;
And (as they had been kinsmen)
Two blacks the casket bore.

Then, down the Via Sacra
The sad procession moved,
While at their doors and windows
The people all approved.

And thus to Master Corvus
Full rites his friends did pay,
And buried him, 'tis said,
Beside the Appian Way,

With lightly sprinkled earth
Above his glossy breast —
With stone, and due inscription,
Hic jacet — and the rest.

" P. ABBOTT "

(*A Tradition of Westminster Abbey*)

'Tis a saying that stolen sweets are sweeter,
And so with my hero it was, I think,
" P. Abbott, " — if Philip or Paul or Peter,
'Twill never be known; there's a missing link.

The legend declares (without praise or censure)
A youth had been challenged to sleep all night
In the gray old Abbey; a madcap adventure,
But madcap adventures were his delight.

In the Chapel of Kings, in Westminster Abbey,
You may see the stone that was brought from Scone,
And above it, the armchair, old and shabby,
Where every king has *once* had his throne.

Monarchs in marble, greater or lesser,
And at least three queens of the English land —
In a circle they lie, round the good Confessor,
Crown on the head and scepter in hand.

Gone from his tomb are the wondrous riches
It once did hold, both of gems and gold;
But you still may see the Gothic niches
Where the sick awaited the cure of old.

Beggar or lord, poor drudge or duchess,
Alike might they hope for the good saint's aid;
And they left their jewels, or dropped their crutches
As token that not in vain had they prayed.

'Twas St. Edward's Day, and the throng, glad-hearted
With the blessing of peace had gone its way;
The last red beam of the sun had departed,
And twilight spread through the chapel gray.

And the marble kings on their marble couches
Once more they are lying in state, alone
Save for a nimble shadow that crouches
Behind the stone that was brought from Scone;

And the aged verger was never the wiser,
As he passed that stone and the oaken chair;
Though watchful was he as watchful miser,
He never discovered my hero was there.

When the keys at his leather girdle jingled,
How loud did they sound in young Abbott's ear!
And when they were still, how the silence tingled!
How dim was the light! — yet why should he fear?

The night was before him, the shadows were dreary
As forth from his hiding-place he crept.
There was nothing to do; his eyelids grew weary,
And into the chair he crept and slept.

Never before, and nevermore since then,
Hath any but royalty sat in that chair;
But my hero himself, I hold, was a prince then—
Of the Realm of Youth and of dreams most fair!

But with the dawn his slumbers were broken,
And, rubbing his eyes, he sat bolt upright.
" 'Twere folly," he cried, " if I left no token
To prove that I stayed in the Abbey all night."

So he carved his name, and carved it quaintly,
As pleased him best, on that ancient seat.
And the sculptured kings in the dawn smiled faintly —
But never a one forbade the feat!

Then, somehow and somewhere, discreetly he flitted;
And when the old verger returned for the day,
" I warrant," he muttered, with bent brows knitted,
" Something uncanny hath passed this way! "

With the record of kings and of statesmen and sages,
This of a mischievous youth is shown:
" P. Abbott," — a name that has lasted for ages,
Nicked on the seat of that oaken throne!

THE GIANT'S DAUGHTER

My story's of the olden day
Beside the hurrying, blue Rhine water,—
My story's of a runaway,—
The Giant Niedeck's little daughter!

She wanders at her own sweet will,
  Her flaxen ringlets wide she tosses:
A dozen steps — she climbs the hill,
  A dozen more — a vineyard crosses!

The pine trees young aside are brushed,
  As though they were but nodding grasses;
She laughs aloud — the birds are hushed,
  And hide away until she passes!

She heeds them not,— the giant mite,
  So bent upon her own wild pleasure;
And now she sees a wondrous sight,
  A curious thing for her to treasure!

" Oh, what a lovely toy I've found! "
  She clapped her hands in childish wonder.
(The great trees trembled, miles around,
  The rocks gave back a sound like thunder.)

A plowman with his horse,— the toy,—
  A plowman at his daily drudging:
She snatched them up with eager joy;
  And home the giant child went trudging.

She reached the castle out of breath,
  And from her pocket (says my fable)
She drew the ploughman, scared to death,
  And laid him swooning on the table.

And then away in haste she sped,
  To bring her nurse and lady mother;
" Now, burn my wooden dolls," she said.
  " Live toys are best — I'll have no other! "

The giant lady, fair and mild,
Thus spake unto her little daughter:
" Go, take the plowman back, my child,
To fields beside the blue Rhine water.

" Though weak and small, his heart is great;
And Liebchen, if we kept him here,
All day, beside his cottage gate,
Would weep for him his children dear."

Then back the giant child did go,
And left the plowman where she found him;
And when the sun was sinking low,
He started up and looked around him.

" I must have dreamed," he laughed outright,
As when some sudden fancy pleases;
" And I will tell my dream to-night
When Gretchen for a story teases! "

EROTION AND THE DOVE.

I was too young, they said (I was not seven),
But I would understand, as I grew older,
Why the White Dove that died was not in heaven.
But they were wrong, for when I came to heaven,—
When first I came, and all was strange and lonely,
My pretty pet flew straight upon my shoulder!
And there she stays all day; at evening only,
Between my hands, close to my breast, I fold her.

THE HOMESICK SOLDIER

The soldier woke at the quail's first note,
At dawn, on the grassy couch where he lay:
" O bird, that calls from the fields of home,
What do my darlings so far away ? "
" They are up and ready to roam;
They scatter the dew with their small bare feet,
And laugh as they wade through the meadow sweet."

The soldier paused on the dusty march,
And stooped by the cooling stream to drink:
" O river, that runs through the fields of home,
What do my dear ones, who dwell on thy brink ? "
" Farther and farther they roam —
They are sending their mimic fleets adrift;
And they follow them borne on my current swift."

The soldier sank on the twilight sward,
And the vigilant lights were thronging above;
" O stars that shine on the fields of home,
What do they now, whom most I love ? "
" They have ceased to roam, to roam ,—
And are lisping a prayer at their mother's knee;
And that prayer, and her tears, are for thee, for thee! "

THE COSSACK MOTHER

My little one will die to-night
(Then break, my heart, oh, break!);
But 'twill not be a lonely flight
Her tender soul shall take.

For there, where smoky clouds are spread,
That blot the sunset sky,
Are many dying, many dead,
And others yet to die.

My child loved soldiers so! And they,
Whene'er they passed this door,
Would toss her in their arms, in play,
And laugh when she cried, " More! "

So, when she passes hence to-night,
They, too,— the brave, the strong,
As up they climb the heavenly height,
Will bear her soul along!

With spirit lances shining clear,
They reach God's citadel:—
My little one will have no fear,
With friends she loves so well.

THE BLOSSOM-CHILD

The flowers, the haunted flowers of May,
They bring delight, they bring heartache;
What wondrous things to me they say!

So bright — so dim, so sad — so gay,
No stem of theirs I dare to break —
The flowers — the haunted flowers of May!

When lip to lip they softly lay —
As soft, as still, as flake on flake,
What wondrous things to me they say!

For lo! there comes with them to play,
A child, whose feet no imprint make —
The flowers — the haunted flowers of May!

From Childhood's Land they take their way,
They bloom but for that flower-child's sake —
What wondrous things to me they say!

With them it lives, their little day;
With them, each new-born year, 'twill wake;
The flowers — the haunted flowers of May,
What wondrous things to me they say!

THE CLOCK OF THE YEAR

'Tis the Curfew of the Year, when falls and fades
the maple's leafy fire.
'Tis Midnight of the Year, when streams beneath a
fretted roof retire.
It is the Small Hours of the Year, when none of all
that sleep will wake,
Howe'er the legion storms of heaven their deep and
hidden fastness shake.
It is the Dark Hour ere the Dawn, when, through
the growing rifts of sleep,
The wistful-eyed and moaning dreams of other
days begin to peep.
But when, amid the softening rain, aloft, so mellow
and so clear,
The first flute of the robin sounds, it is the Day-
break of the Year!

III

SOME OF THEIR FRIENDS

THE YOUNG OF SPRING

There are so many, many young!
So many, in thy world, O Spring,
And scarcely yet they find a tongue,
Their wants to cry, their joys to sing.

There are so many, many young —
Be tender to such tenderness;
And let soft arms be round them flung,
Keep them from blight, from weather stress!

White lambs upon the green-lit sward,
And dappled darlings of the kine—
O Spring, have them in watch and ward
And mother them — for all are thine.

There are so many, many young!
Thine, too, the wild mouse and her brood
Within a last year's bird's-nest swung —
And all shy litters of the wood!

There are so many, many young —
Guard all — guard closeliest this year's nest;
Oh, guard, for Joy, the songs unsung
Within the thrush's speckled breast!

THE TRIUMPH OF THE BROWN THRUSH

A recent convention of Nature's musicians
(Their entire resolutions the Owlet quotes)
Took " high southern ground," and, from lofty positions,
All muffled in feathers and down, to their throats,
Resolved to expel, without any conditions,
The cuckoo-like fellow who stole their best notes.

With spirit the Song-sparrow opened the session;
" I'm with you," whistled the Oriole, " I
Would like him subjected to public confession "—
" And fined! " the Vireo said with a sigh.
" Pshaw! " hissed the Wren, with ruffled aggression,
" Pluck him, I say, and then bid him fly! "

Answered the Brown Thrush, high in his palace,
" 'Tis true I have taken your notes — less or more —
And mingled them well (for I bear you no malice),
Just as the wines some wizard of yore
Would mingle together, then pour from his chalice
Magic new wine never tasted before! "

DAY — WIDE DAY!

Day to the washing seas, and to the patient land,
And to the little nautilus upon the sand.

Day to the toiler gone afield, and to the child,
And to the peetweet's brood amid the marshes wild.

While these awake to toil and those awake to play,
How glad are all that breathe, that night has winged
away!

For light and life are friends, and night their ancient
foe.
Awake, ye birds, to song, ye buds, begin to blow!

THE BLOSSOMS OF TO-MORROW

The sun was shining, after rain,
The garden gleamed and glistened;
I heard a humblebee complain —
I bent me down and listened.

Around a nodding stalk he flew,
That bore white lilies seven;
And five were opened wide, and two
Slept in their lily heaven.

The foolish bee, the grumbling bee,
That might have found a palace
(As any one beside could see)
Within the honeyed chalice —

The grumbling bee, the foolish bee,
Still hummed one note of sorrow:
"Oh, that to-day would give to me
The blossoms of to-morrow."

From bud to bud, the livelong hour,
I saw him pass and hover,
And pry about each fast-shut flower,
Some entrance to discover.

A discontented mind, no doubt,
A moral here should borrow;
I only say: " Don't fret about
The blossoms of to-morrow! "

THE NEST IN THE HEATHER

(*In Scotland it was an old custom for the young people on Easter morning to hunt for eggs of the wild fowl*)

Oh, fine it is at Easter
To hunt the wild fowl's nest!
A rush o' wings — a feather
From aff a broodin' breast —
A twinkle o' the heather —
An' weel ye ken the rest!

Before we've ta'en a dewbit,
A' in the morning gray,
It's callin' ane anither
In haste to be away —
It's cryin', " Wish me, mither,
The best luck o' the day! "

An' mither's gi'en us kisses,
Wi' little sighs between;
An' if a teardrop's blinkin'

Within her tender een,
It's, maybe, that she's thinkin'
O' Easters that hae been!

Then lads and lassies scatter,
To hunt the eggs sae white;
They thither run, an' hither,
An' shout in their delight!
An' if twa hunt thegither,
They ken it isna right!

No laddie to a lassie
Of hidden nest may tell;
Nor lass of laddie ask it,
But she maun seek hersel'!
Wha brings the fullest basket —
Guid luck wi' him shall dwell!

Oh, fine it is at Easter
To hunt the wild fowl's nest;
An' when the sun is beamin',
It's hame we'll gang in haste;
For now the brose is steamin,'
The chair for us is placed!

But oh! for a' the pleasure,
Ae thing I canna thole —
The puir wild birdie's greetin' —
It's pierced my verra soul!
I hear ilk ane repeatin',
" It was my eggs ye stole! "

LADY-GROVE (SILVER BIRCHES)

This side the deeper wood,
  Of somber oak and pine,
A dryad sisterhood
  Upon the hill's incline,
In poised expectance stand,
  As waiting but the sign,
To dance a saraband!

The oaks and pines, alway,
  A darkling mystery hide.
In Lady-Grove, all day,
  The cheerful sunbeams glide;
And many a singing brood
  In peace and joy abide
With this lov'd sisterhood.

Their raiment fair is wove
  Of tender green and white:
Come, Breeze, to Lady-Grove
  And put their trance to flight;
For if they once were freed —
  My Silver Birches light —
Ah, what a dance they'd lead!

SHADOW BROOK

Shadow Brook creeps round the hill,
Shadow Brook darts past the mill —
Coming from the wood, in haste
Seeks again its native waste!
Meanwhile, every friend it meets

For protection it entreats;
Saying: " Willows, close around,
That my path may not be found!
Grass and sedges interlace,
Throw a veil across my face!
Clematis and gold-thread weave
Meshes that can best deceive!

Celandine and gentian rise,
And my ripples help disguise!
Pebbles, do not tempt to play
Lest my laughter should betray!
Silent as my minnows are,
I would glide afar, afar:
Help me, friends, to reach the wood,
And its happy solitude,
Where I have my chosen bed
Of the brown leaves underspread."

Thus, in ways it knoweth best,
Shadow Brook runs on its quest,
Shadow Brook — a hermit stream —
Finding life a pleasant dream.

THE BROOK AND THE BIRD

I listened to a summer brook
That rippled past my shady seat;
Now far, now near, now vague, now clear,
The music of its liquid feet.

Few tones the slender rillet has —
That few how sweet, how soothing sweet!
A live delight, by day, by night,
The music of its liquid feet!

While there I mused, a songbird lit
And swung above my shady seat:
He heard the brook, and straightway took
The music of its liquid feet!

A bird's bright glance on me he bent,—
A bird's glance, fearless yet discreet;
As who might say, "This roundelay
Of liquid joy I can repeat!"

The mimic carol done, once more
He needs must try its measures sweet; —
Again, again, that rippling strain
My songbird did repeat, repeat!

Since then I've learned that human breasts
To few and simple measures beat;
O blessed bird, my heart-warm word
I, too, repeat, repeat, repeat!

THE BIRDS OF SOLEURE

Thrifty the folk in the town of Soleure,
And they steadily ply their fathers' trade;
Proud are they, too, that, year after year,
The watches and clocks of the world they have made.

Click go the seconds, kling go the hours,
In the town of Soleure the time is well kept!
Ever, new steel they cut and trim,
While into the street the filings are swept.

Only waste metal, unfit for use;
But it catches the sunshine and glitters still —
And what are those thrushes doing there,
Each with a scrap of steel in its bill ?

The watchmaker's boy has paused with his broom,
And he follows the birds with a boy's keen eye;
Their secret he learns, and whither they go,
In the leafy tent of yon linden high!

Their secret he guards the springtime through,
And he smiles when he hears the young ones call;
" Never had birdlings a cradle like theirs —
Surely to them can no harm befall! "

When the leaves are flying and birds are flown,
'Tis out on the linden bough he swings —
The fearless lad that he is — and thence,
A wonderful nest of steel he brings!

It yet may be seen in the town of Soleure,
To show how the skill of the birds began
At the point where human skill fell short;
For they used what was waste in the hands of man.

Where, think you, a little gray finch in the far wide West
Chose (of all places!) to build and to brood her nest?

Well, I will tell you the tale that the hunter told:
(Strange things has he seen — this hunter grizzled and old.)

He spoke of the cattle that came to no herder's call,
Roaming the fenceless prairie from springtime to fall.

A shot from his rifle laid low the king of the herd —
When, hark! the sharp cry of a circling and hovering bird!

What did it mean? The hunter drew in his rein,
And leaped to the ground, where dead lay the lord of the plain!

Stilled was the beating heart, and glazed were the eyes;
The fluttering bird circled higher, and sharper her cries;

While, finer and fainter, yet many, and all as keen,
Came cries from below, as in answer. What could it mean?

The hunter bent down; and his heart with wonder was stirred,
When he saw, between the wide horns, the nest of a bird,

Like a crown which the prairie's monarch might
choose to wear
On his shaggy forelock, and lined with the friendly
hair!

The hunter stood still, abashed in the midst of the
plain,
To hear the little gray mother's cry of pain,

And the faint fine voices of nestlings answer the cry;
While their fearless friend lay dead between earth
and sky!

THE MOVING OF THE NEST

Do not ask me *why?* or *how?* —
All in Fairyland it chanced,
As the leaves upon the bough
In the autumn breezes danced!

"Quip-a-quip-a-quip-a-queer!"
Said the Thrush unto his mate.
"We must soon be gone from here;
No one else would stay so late!"

Do not ask me *why?* or *how?* —
But his mate did sorely grieve:
"My dear nest upon this bough
It will break my heart to leave!"

Do not ask me *how?* or *why?* —
But the thrush's children, too,
Perched around, began to cry,
"Oh, whatever shall we do?"

"Cheep-a-cheep-a-cheep-a-cheer!
Never such a nest as ours;
We would rather have it, *here*,
Than Bermuda and the flowers!"

"Cheep-a-cheep-a-cheep-a-cheer,"
Pleaded then the thrush's mate:
"Let us take the nest, my dear,
It is light and we are eight!"

(Do not ask me *why?* or *how?* —)
But the thrushes, with a cheer,
Took that nest from off the bough —
"Quip-a-quip-a-quip-a-queer!

"Quip-a-quip-a-quip-a-queer!
Firmly, now, with beak and claw;
Spread your wings, and never fear,—
You to push, and *you* to draw!"

So the thrushes took their nest,
Every one his strength applied;
But the youngest 'twas thought best
Should be snugly tucked inside.

All in Fairyland it chanced!
There is nothing more to say;
Ere the morn was far advanced,
They were miles and miles away!

THE WIDOWED EAGLE

Out from the aërie beloved we flew,
Now through the white, and now through the blue;
Glided beneath us hilltop and glen,
River and meadow and dwellings of men!

We flew, we flew through the regions of light
And the wind's wild pæan followed our flight!
Free of the world, we flew, we flew —
Bound to each other alone,— we two!

To the shivering migrant we called " Adieu! "
Mid the frost-sweet weather, we flew, we flew!
Till, hark from below! the hiss of lead,
And one of us dropped, as a plume is shed!

Around and around I flew, I flew,
Wheeling my flight, ever closer I drew!
There, on the earth, my belovèd lay,
With a crimson stain on her breast-plumes gray!

And creatures of earth we had scorned before,
Now measured the wings that would lift no more:
And I stooped, as an arrow is shot from the height,
And sought to bear her away in my flight —

Away to our aërie far to seek!
Well did I fight with talons and beak;
But the craven foe, in their numbers and might,
Bore her in triumph out of my sight!

THE CHICKADEE

Black-cap, madcap,
Never tired of play,
What's the news to-day?
"Faint-heart, faint-heart,
Winter's coming up this way,
And the winter comes to stay!"

Black-cap, madcap,
Whither will you go,
Now the storm-winds blow?
"Faint-heart, faint-heart,
In the pine boughs, thick and low,
We are sheltered from the snow!"

Black-cap, madcap,
In the snow and sleet,
What have you to eat?
"Faint-heart, faint-heart,
Seeds and berries are a treat,
When the frost has made them sweet!"

Black-cap, madcap,
Other birds have flown
To a summer zone!
"Faint-heart, faint-heart,
When they're gone, we black-caps own
Our white playground all alone!"

THE EARTH-MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN

Her children all were gathered round her,
  One olden, golden day;
Between her tender, drooping eyelids
  She watched them feed or play.

Upon the lion's living velvet
  She pillowed her fair head;
A white fawn pushed its dewy muzzle
  Beneath the hand that fed.

A goldfinch clung upon a ringlet
  That brushed her wide, smooth brow;
And, thence, right merrily he answered
  His comrades on the bough.

But at her feet there lay a sleeper,
  Of subtly-fashioned limb;
Whose motion, force and will to be,
  Kept yet their prison dim.

And round about his couch of slumber
  The rest a space did make:
" Your peace " (the Mother told her children)
  " Is broken, if he wake!

" Lo! this — the best of all created —
  Shall yet an evil bring:
And ye in doubt shall graze the pasture,
  And ye in fear shall sing.

" For your dear sake, my lesser children,
I keep him long asleep;
Play on, sing on, a happy season —
His dreams be passing deep! "

Thus, while her children gathered round her,
And while Man sleeping lay,
The fair Earth-Mother softly murmured,
" It is your Golden Day! "

"WHEN THE LEAVES ARE GONE"

When the leaves are gone, the birds are gone,
And 'tis very silent at the dawn.
Snowbird, nuthatch, chickadee,—
Come and cheer the lonely tree!

When the leaves are gone, the flowers are gone,
Fast asleep beneath the ground withdrawn.
Flowers of snow, so soft and fine —
Clothe the shivering branch and vine!

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

(1621)

I would like to lift the curtain
Hides the past from mortal view,
For a glimpse of one Thanksgiving
When New England still was new.

I would like to see that feast day
Bradford for his people made,
Ere the onset of the winter,
That their hearts might be upstayed.

First he sent a score of yeomen,
Skilled in woodcraft, sure of aim;
All one day they spent in hunting,
That there might be store of game.

Fathers, brothers (aye, and lovers!),
Home they bring the glossy deer;
Some but praise their hunter's prowess,
Some, soft-hearted, drop a tear.

I would like to see those housewives,
Busy matrons, maidens too,
Watching by the ripening oven,
Bending o'er the home-made brew.

I would like to see the feasting
Where the snowy cloth is spread;
Here shall no one be forgotten,
Here shall all be warmed and fed.

Welcome, too, ye friendly shadows
At the white man's feast and sport,
Tufted warriors, grave onlooking,
Massasoit and his court.

" MASCOTS "

Home they come from Cuba Libre;
And they march with hastening feet
Underneath the floating banners,
Up the thronged and ringing street.

When you cheer your sunburnt heroes,
  Don't forget their pensioners small,
Led along, or perched on shoulder,
  Four-foot, furry " mascots " all!

Comrades of the march and bivouac,
  Sharers of the cup and can,
All unconscious of their portion
  In the drama played by man.

Did they bring, perchance, good fortune
  (As they brought their owners joy) ?
Ask the youth who owns the " mascot " —
  For a soldier's but a boy!

MOTHER FUR

I wonder what charm there can be in fur ?
The kitten curls up and begins to purr,
The puppy tumbles about in the rug
In his silly way and gives it a hug,
And mousekin, that even a shadow can scare,
For a moment lies still in the long, soft hair
Then slips away to its home in the wall.
Can it be — poor darlings! that each and all
Believe 'tis their mother, and hasten to her ?

All babies, I think, love old Mother Fur;
For my little brother — too little to speak —
See how he nestles his peach-blossom cheek
In the velvet coat that the tiger wore,
As it lies stretched out at length on the floor!

Tiger, if you were alive— dear me!
I shudder to think how cruel you'd be.
No doubt in your day you did harm enough,
But now you're safe as my tippet or muff!
You, too, I will call (since you never can stir)
Old Mother Fur, kind Mother Fur!

WHAT THE CAT-MOTHER SAID

We live in a cave the wild-rose bushes hide,
For my kittens and I were turned out of the house.
There are plenty of birds here, on every side —
And a bird I must catch, for I can't find a mouse!

WHAT THE BIRD-MOTHER SAID

Keep still in the nest, O my birdlings dear,
While I search for a worm! Do not chirrup one word!
There's a cruel tigress crouching so near —
For her hungry cubs she is seeking a bird!

WHAT THE FRIEND OF BOTH SAID

The friend of both to pity was stirred,
And a wish divided, her heart possessed:
" May you hungry kittens lack never a bird "—
" May you birdlings dear be safe in your nest! "

THE LITTLE BROWN BAT

Quoth the little brown bat: " I rise with the owl,—
Wisest and best of the feathered fowl;
Let other folks rise, if they will, with the lark,
And be early and bright — I am early and dark! "

Quoth the little brown bat: " I'm awake and up,
When the night-moth sips from the lily's white cup;
While the firefly lanterns are searching the sky,
I am glancing about, with fiery eye! "

Quoth the little brown bat: " The night has its noon
As well as its day — and I'm friends with the moon.
Many a secret she tells me alone,
Which never a bird or a bee has known! "

Quoth the little brown bat: "There is house-room for me,
When the winter comes, in some hollow tree;
Or under barn eaves, near the fragrant hay,
I sleep the dull winter hours away."

THE LOST CHARTER

(Based on an Arabic Legend)

PERSONS

BOUNCE, a wire-haired Terrier;
TIP, a tortoise-shell Cat;
An old and faithful Servant of both.

Prologue by Old Servant, as follows:

We three before the fire, one night,
Had but its flickering blaze for light —
My dog, my cat, on either side;
I mused, while they grew sleepy-eyed.
But, if they waked, or if they slept,
Still each some watch on other kept.
Now what is this, good Bounce, good Tip,
That mars your perfect fellowship ?
Speak up! Speak up! you, Tip,— you, Bounce,
Your mutual grievances announce.

At this my dog awoke from doze,
Drew near, and thrust a foolish nose
Beneath my hand; then, deeply sighed.
Her gold-stone eyes Tip opened wide,
The middle of the hearth she took,
And cast on Bounce a scornful look;
And then, this colloquy began,
Which I record as best I can.

The Dialogue

Tip:

Dear Mistress, plainly I must speak;
For *he*, who should be dumb and meek,
The simple truth would never say
And his own foolish act betray —

Bounce (*interrupting pleadingly*):

Oh, do not heed her, Mistress dear;
Think how I love you, guard you, cheer!

TIP (*proceeds with withering disregard*):
When all we creatures were assigned
Our places with your human kind,
('Twas long ago) while some became
Your slaves — as spiritless as tame,
We two, as friends, beneath your roof
Were lodged, because we each gave proof —

BOUNCE (*licking Old Servant's hand*):
Yes, yes — I of my faithfulness —
Man calls on me in all distress!

TIP (*severely*):
You blundering, careless beast, be still!
My cleanliness, my grace, my skill,
Did, quite as much myself commend!
That we should live, not slave, but friend
To Master Man was then agreed:
But since of caution there is need,
We asked a written document;
To which our Master did consent.
Puffed up with confidence and pride,
He took the document to hide.
[*Extends her paw towards Bounce, who winces and buries his nose deeper under old Servant's hand*

He hid it in his old bone-cave;
And then, no further thought he gave
The precious charter of our rights —
Engaged in noisy bouts and fights!

BOUNCE (*excitedly*):
There was foul play, O Mistress mine —
The other creatures did combine!

TIP:
Hush! 'twas your carelessness, in chief,
That gave the chance to knave and thief!
The jealous Ox and Horse conspired,
And then, the villain Rat they hired
To delve in darkness underground
Till he the precious charter found,
And brought the Horse and Ox, who thought
Their liberty could thus be bought,—
The tiresome creatures! To this day
They drudge and drudge, the same old way!
The Ox, the Ass, the Horse — these all
Divided with the Rat their stall,
And from their mangers grain they gave —
Such price they paid the thievish knave!
What loss was ours, we scarce can know —
The charter we could never show!
I might have had a dais spread
With crimson velvet, and been fed
On golden finches every day;
But, as for *him* (*indicating Bounce*), he's naught
to say
(He lost the charter of our rights)—
When flogged, or chained on moonlight nights!
Upon one subject, only, we
Can always heartily agree,
[*gracefully waving her paw,*
You, careless Dogs, we, careful Cats —
Our common enemy —

BOUNCE:
Yes, Rats!

[*Joyously embracing opportunity to reinstate himself*

OLD SERVANT (*starting up suddenly*):
Ah, who said " Rats! " just now — and where ?
And why cannot you two play fair ?

[*At this, Tip is seen to be occupying her own corner of the hearth, and Bounce to be sound asleep, his nose deeply buried between his forepaws. Old Servant rubs her eyes, then smiles thoughtfully, and settles back in easy-chair*

THE SAVING OF JACK

An East Side Incident

" Whose dog is Jack ? " He belongs to this street.
Needs anti-fat — has too much to eat.
" Houseless and homeless ? " — Well I guess not;
In the whole of this block there isn't a tot
But has had Jack home to board and to sleep,
And he pays 'em in fun, every cent of his keep.
He's the best-natured dog, and the smartest, too;
No end of the tricks we've taught him to do.
Got a heap of sense in his yellow hide!
He's the wonderf'lest dog on the whole East Side;
Why, even the dog-man doesn't know
What breed Jack is, — for he told me so!

The dog-catchers came a'most every day,
But Jack knew their cart, and he'd hide away;
Then out he'd come, laughing, when they'd got past.
Can't *guess* how he ever was cotched at last;
But he was, and they boosted him into their cart,
And nobody there could take his part.
My! but the little kids cried like mad,
And us bigger ones, too, — we felt just as bad;
For he'd rode us all on his old yellow back.
It looked as though it was all up with Jack,
And I watched him go; but he cocked one eye
As much as to say, " I'll be back by and by."
The look that he gave me — it made me *think;*
And I thought of a plan as quick as wink
And I says, " Feller-citizens, ladies and gents,
I guess that we've each of us got a few cents,
And we'll club together and have a show,
And charge a price, not high nor low;
And we'll raise the money, right here and now,
That'll buy Jack back by to-morrow — that's how!
Tony, the Eyetalian boy, he'll sing;
And Patsy McGovern'll do his handspring;
And Ikey Aarons'll swallow his knife,
And make us all think he's taking his life,
And little Freda, she'll pass round the hat,
She'll smile and say nothing — she's just good for
that! "
Well, we emptied our pockets — you bet we did! —
Every one of us big 'uns and each little kid
Ran home for their banks as fast as they could;
And we raised the money, and all felt good;
And next day, early, we brought Jack back.
So, now, things run in the same old track,
But he's got his license and *don't have to hide!*
And we've bought him a *byootiful collar beside.*

SKYE OF SKYE

Skye, of Skye, when the night was late,
  And the burly porter drowsy grew,
Ran down to the silent pier, to wait
  Till the boat came in with its hardy crew.

Skye, of Skye, as he sat on the pier,
  Turned seaward ever a watchful eye,
And his shaggy ears were pricked to hear
  The plash of oars, as the boat drew nigh.

Skye, of Skye, when they leaped ashore,
  Greeted the crew with a joyful cry —
Kissed their hands, and trotted before
  To the inn that stood on the hilltop high.

Within, was the porter sound asleep —
  They could almost hear his lusty snore:
Then Skye, of Skye, with an antic leap,
  Would pull on the bellrope that swung by the door.

Then was the bolt drawn quickly back —
  Then did the jolly crew stream in;
And — "Landlaird, bring us your best auld sack!"
  And — "Aweel, aweel, where hae ye been?"

Then Skye, of Skye, on the beach-white floor,
  Sanded that day by the housemaid neat,
Lay down to rest him — his vigils o'er,
  With his honest nose between his feet.

But Skye, of Skye as he rolled his eye
On the friendly crowd, heard his master say,
" Na, na, that doggie ye couldna buy —
Not though his weight in gold ye would pay! "

Skye, of Skye, they have made him a bed
On the wind-swept cliff, by the ocean's swell;
On the stone they have reared above his head,
You may see a little dog ringing a bell.

TIP'S KITTEN

The master, —he loved my kitten, my kitten;
She was still too weak to stand,
When he placed her upon one hand,
And over it laid the other,
And looked at me kindly, and said,
" Tip, you're a proud little mother! "

For they'd left me but one, my kitten, my kitten —
As sweet as a kitten could be —
And I loved her for all the three
They had taken away without warning.
I watched her from daylight till dark,
Watched her from night until morning!

I never left my kitten, my kitten
(For I feared — and I loved her so!)
Till I thought it time she should know
That cats in the house have a duty,
And a right to be proud of their skill,
As well as their grace and their beauty.

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I only left my kitten, my kitten,
A few short moments in all,
To punish the mouse in the wall,
Each day growing bolder and bolder;
And I brought her the mouse to show
What kittens must do when older.

I brought her the mouse — my kitten, my kitten!
I tossed it, I caught it for her;
But she would not see, nor stir.
My heart it beat fast and faster;
And I caught her up in my mouth,
And carried her so, to the master.

I thought he would help — my kitten, my kitten!
And I laid her down at his feet —
(Never a kitten so sweet,
And he knew that I had no other!)
But he only said, " Poor Tip,
'Tis a sad day for you, little mother! "

THE KING OF CATS

I

The wind comes down the chimney with a sigh,
The kettle sings, chain-swung from grimy hook,
While ticks the clock unseen on mantel high.
The black cat holds the cosiest chimney-nook,
Straight in the blaze his gold-stone eyeballs look,
And children four do pay him flattering court.
The baby brings to him its picture-book,
And shows the way to build a castled fort.
The black cat shares, indeed, their every thought
and sport.

II

The black cat came to us a twelvemonth since;
The black cat is a stranger with us yet;
We treat him well; we call him our Black Prince.
So thick and glossy is his coat of jet
You well might say that you have never met
A cat so lordly, though he seems to brood
Over some wrong he never can forget.
We know that he could tell us, if he would —
Our dear Black Prince, so sad, so gentle, and so good!

III

"You prattle, children. Fritz, bestir yourself!
The fire needs wood, so hungry is the wind;
And Elsa, bring the platters from the shelf
And lay the table. You, too, Gretchen, mind,
For you of late are carelessly inclined,
And brittle is the *blaue glocken* ware.
Make haste, else will your father come and find,
For all his day's hard work, but churlish fare.
Full sure I am no man works harder anywhere."

IV

The good house-mother speaks, and not in vain,
For promptly all her willing brood obey.
They hear the dead leaves click against the pane,
Updriven by the wind in its mad play.
"One might be thankful that one need not stray
On such a night as this — 'tis just the night
When the Wild Huntsman (as the people say),
With all his hounds is scouring heaven's height,
And you may see him if, as now, the moon be bright."

V

" It is an old and foolish tale. Be still,
For now, I think, your father's step I hear,
Though not the tune he whistles down the hill.
He comes — is at the door. Why, goodman, dear,
You're out of breath! Bad news you bring, I fear."
" Bad news " (the goodman smiles, with half a frown),
" But not for us; and so take heart of cheer.
I own I'm out of breath— but sit ye down
And hear the strangest thing e'er happened in this town."

The children gather at their father's knees
And, wonder-eyed, the coming story wait,—
The story strange, the story sure to please.
The black cat, who absorbed their cares but late,
Is left to hold his solitary state.
" 'Twas thus," the father said, " as I came home,
I reached the ruined castle's postern gate
Just at the time the bats begin to roam
And dart with heedless wings about the ivied gloam;

VII

" When, on my left, along the crumbling wall,
Sharp-graved against the pallid afterglow,
I saw a funeral train, with sweeping pall,
And mournful bearers in a double row.
I rubbed my eyes, I looked again, and lo!

No human forms composed that funeral train! "
(The black cat's eyes of gold-stone glitter so!
He rises from the spot where he hath lain
And listens well, as one who does not list in vain.)

VIII

" Folk say the Schloss was ever haunted ground;
But tell us, father,what those mourners were."
The father answered, smiling as he frowned:
" Now, if 'twere told by some strange traveller,
I'd say, 'Too much you tax our faith, good sir.'
But truth was ever priceless unto me.
Those mourners, clad in somber coats of fur,
Were cats — no more, nor less! This I did see,
And that the dead grimalkin was of high degree."

IX

Up, up the chimney go the sparks apace;
Up, up, to vanish in the gusty sky.
The black cat — look! he leaves his wonted place,
And hark! he speaks: " *Then, king of cats am I!*"
And with this first and last word for good-by,
Up, up the chimney he hath vanished quite.
" Our dear, our good Black Prince!" the children cry;
" We always thought he should be king by right,
But we shall miss him sadly, both by day and night."

X

The legend saith (I know no more than you,
Reader of fairy lore with fancy fraught),
That humble hearth nor evil fortune knew,
Nor discontent. Long time the children sought
For tidings of the lost; yet heard they naught;
But sometimes, of a winter eventide,
When all was bright within, the children thought
That, when they called up through the chimney wide,
Thence, with a gentle purr, their olden friend replied.

WAIFS

Wept the Child that no one knew,
Wandering on, without a clew;
Wept so softly none did stay;
So, farther yet, he went astray.

Cried the Lamb that missed the fold,
Trembling more from fear than cold —
" I am lost, and thou art lost —
Both upon the wide world tossed!
Why not wander on together,
Through the bright or cloudy weather ? "

Then the Child that no one knew
Looked through eyes that shone like dew.
Laughed, and wept, " Lost as I am,
Come with me, thou poor lost Lamb! "

Moaned the youngling wood-dove left
By the flock, of flight bereft,
" Thou art lost, and we are lost —
All upon the wide world tossed!
Why not wander on together,
Through the bright or cloudy weather ? "

Then the Child that no one knew
Closer to the nestling drew,
Hand beneath, and hand above,
Thus he held the quivering Dove.
Still they wander on together,
Through the bright or cloudy weather,—
Spotless Lamb and Dove and Child,
Comrades in the lonesome wild;
Child and Lamb and nestling Dove,—
Truth and Innocence and Love!
Blest their hearth, and blest their field,
Who to these a shelter yield.

FROST-FLOWERS OF THE PAVEMENT

I sighed for flowers, in wintry hours
When gardens were a loveless waste;
Mine eye fell on the pavement stone,
There flowers and flowers and flowers were traced.

For me alone, the pavement stone,
That garden pleasance did prepare;
Or else, would others stop to see
What flowers and flowers and flowers bloom there!

STARS OF THE SNOW

The stars are falling, are falling,
By stream-side and meadow and wood;
They silence the whispering leaves;
And swiftly and softly they brood
The robin's lone nest in the eaves.

The stars are falling, are falling,
Yet Night has lost never a one,
Of all that are gathered below;
To-morrow they'll melt in the sun —
For these are the stars of the snow.

The stars are falling, are falling —
Look! On your sleeve is a star!
Six-pointed and perfect its form,
Six-pointed its comrades are,—
All, gems of this wonder-storm!

JUNE IN THE SKY

Slow through the light and silent air,
Up climbs the smoke on its spiral stair —
The visible flight of some mortal's prayer;
The trees are in bloom with the flowers of frost,
But never a feathery leaf is lost;

The spring, descending, is caught and bound
Ere its silver feet can touch the ground;
So still is the air that lies, this morn,
Over the snow-cold fields forlorn,
'Tis as though Italy's heaven smiled
In the face of some bleak Norwegian wild;
And the heart in me sings — I know not why —
'Tis winter on earth, but June in the sky!

June in the sky! Ah, now I can see
The souls of roses about to be,
In gardens of heaven beckoning me,
Roses red-lipped, and roses pale,
Fanned by the tremulous ether gale!
Some of them climbing a window-ledge,
Some of them peering from wayside hedge,
As yonder, adrift on the aery stream,
Love drives his plumed and filleted team;
The Angel of Summer aloft I see,
And the souls of roses about to be!
And the heart in me sings — the heart knows
why —
'Tis winter on earth, but June in the sky.

MOTHER EARTH

O mother, tuck the children in,
And draw the curtains round their heads;
And mother, when the storms begin,
Let storms forbear those cradle beds.

And if the sleepers wake too soon,
  Say, " Children, 'tis too early yet! "
And hush them with a sleepy tune,
  And closer draw the coverlet.

O Mother Earth, be good to all
  The little sleepers in thy care;
And when 'tis time to wake them, call
  A beam of sun, a breath of air!

THE RAIN RAINS EVERY DAY

Said the robin to his mate
  In the dripping orchard tree:
" Our dear nest will have to wait
  Till the blue sky we can see.
Birds can neither work nor play,
For the rain rains every day,
And the rain rains all the day! "

Said the violet to the leaf:
  " I can scarcely ope my eye;
So, for fear I'll come to grief,
  Close along the earth I lie.
All we flowers for sunshine pray,
But the rain rains every day,
And the rain rains all the day! "

And the children, far and wide,
  They, too, wished away the rain;
All their sports were spoiled outside
  By the " black glove " at the pane.

Very dull indoors to stay
While " the rain rains every day,
And the rain rains all the day! "

Up and down the murmurs run,
  Shared by child and bird and flower.
Suddenly the golden sun
  Dazzled through a clearing shower.
Then they all forgot to say
That " the rain rains every day,
And the rain rains all the day! "

THE GOOD BY

When the Little Girl said Good by,
  At the turn of the road, on the hill,
Was there a tear in her eye ?
  And why did she keep so still ?

When the Little Girl said Good by,
  She never looked back at all!
Was there a tear in her eye ?
  I thought I could hear it fall!

And then were the flowers more sweet,
  And the grass breathed a long, low sigh —
I know — for I heard my heart beat —
  There *was* a tear in her eye!